

April 26, 2021

Chair Gavarone, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Maharath, and Honorable Members of the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs' budget allocation in Sub. House Bill 110.

My name is Jenice Contreras and I serve as the Executive Director of The Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development. I express my support for the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs (OCHLA) and its budget allocation as currently included in Sub. HB 110. Since its inception, the Commission has been a valuable resource to the Hispanic community throughout the State, from advocating on issues impacting our Hispanic communities to being our representation with the administration and legislators in the State of Ohio.

Thanks to the Commission, the Hispanic community has a dedicated staff to alert us of legislation, programs, and initiatives that could have an impact to our increasing Hispanic population in Ohio. Furthermore, the Commission is invaluable when it comes to engaging with Ohio legislators and government officials. The annual Hispanic Legislative Day at the Ohio Statehouse that is organized by OCHLA brings an average of more than 300 participants, including Latino elected officials, community members, and legislators. This yearly event is an important gathering for Hispanic/Latino Ohioans to "hear and be heard" about public policy issues, for Hispanics to advocate in a united way, and to be an integral part of our democratic processes. This is important as the Hispanic population in the United States and Ohio continues to grow at a rapid rate. In the state of Ohio, the Hispanic/Latino population is nearing half a million. The number of businesses owned by Latinos has increased to over 16,000 in Ohio with \$2.8 billion in receipts. This shows that of the many Hispanics that are living in Ohio, many are starting businesses and helping boost our economy.

The Commission works with federal, state, and local levels of government, as well as the non-profit and private sectors. This ensures that organizations and agencies have the ability and opportunity to engage with Hispanic/Latinos across all levels. The variety of events the Commission hosts create the space to bring forth important issues and work with stakeholders to create innovative solutions. Examples of these events are the virtual 2020 Ohio Latino Affairs Summit, themed: "Uniting in Health, Education and Business" which attracted around 150 participants to engage in key challenges, solutions, and opportunities for Latinos. In 2019, the Commission hosted the Ohio Latino Health Summit that is going on almost a decade in partnership with the Ohio State University. The Health Summit that the Commission hosts attracts 250-300 people each year. Also in 2019, the Commission hosted an Ohio Latino Education Summit with Kent State University, which brought together a record breaking almost 500 participants. At these events, community leaders and advocates gather to share best practices on how to serve constituents including but not limited to the 117,000 Latino students and their families in our State's K-12 school system.

Creating resources and managing constituent services is another major area where the Commission helps our State. They have bilingual resources available online for all ranging from scholarships, job postings, and service directories. The amount of work and effort that goes into these endeavors is extensive, diligent, and thorough. The Commission does this and much more even with a small, but dedicated core staff.

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These are just a few examples of why the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs is such an important asset to Hispanics/Latino Ohioans. OCHLA is the trusted link between the community and government. We need their services now more than ever, especially since Hispanics are making a difference, becoming part of the Ohio mainstream, and the Hispanic population continues to grow.

I fully support full funding of the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs as currently laid out in Sub. HB 110. The allocation of \$464,047 per fiscal year in the upcoming biennium is a conservative yet manageable budget to continue the great work of the Commission for the State.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit my statement in support of OCHLA.



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